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ABSTRACT

Journalism instructors are concerned that the credibility of images and consequently of words will suffer if the image content, as the photographer took the picture at the time, is altered by a computer operator far removed from the actual scene. Any discussion of picture manipulation ethics must take into account where and why a picture was used--its context. Most past violations of ethical standards have come about because an internal element of the picture has been altered or removed. Educators must teach themselves how computer software can be used to make all of the traditional darkroom manipulations and how that same software can be used to manipulate the content of those images. But concentration on the picture manipulation issue detracts from other important issues that face photography and photography educators. Picture manipulation is an important topic, but since it has been a constant theme in photography since at least 1839, it is not the most interesting ethical question. Victims of violence and right to privacy issues are much more interesting ethical problems for students than whether it is proper to erase a line through a picture or move a pyramid. Photojournalism educators accept subject and picture manipulations within an advertising context, but "shock ads" blur the distinction between advertisement and editorial. Technology is causing a merger between words and images. A theory that can explain and set within a context the rapid merging of words and images is desperately needed. Educators with word and image backgrounds need to work together to anticipate the social, economic, and educational changes that will arise as technology proceeds. (Five figures of famous photographs altered through the use of computer software are included.) (RS)

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Photojournalism Issues for the 1990s:
Concerns for all teachers of journalism courses

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Photojournalism Issues for the 1990s:
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In a recently completed, unpublished dissertation, "Issues of Photography by the Year 2000," Neil Chapman of California State University, Long Beach named the top ten issues identified by 46 professional, journalistic, artistic and academic photography experts using the Delphi process. Those ten issues were (with rank 1 first):

•Photographic education should be immersed in the Liberal Arts (students need to be exposed to a wide range of ideas).

•Teach commitment to one's work and the development of a strong personal philosophy.

•Teach and cultivate independence and initiative together with responsibility.

•Censorship of photographic images.

•Basics of form, lighting and composition.

•Continue teaching the aesthetic ("art appreciation") side of photography -- the great photographers and their photographs.

•Definition and creation of new rights, copyrights and ethical standards in regard to new technology and digital imaging.

•Continue teaching photographic "seeing" -- pre-visualization -- regardless of the specific medium used.

•Understand that technique is a means to an end, not the end itself.

•Continue teaching photography's role as an agent for social documentation and social change.[1]

The list of issues is surprising because almost none of the topics are technologically driven. All but three of the topics are concerned with a student's education in the broadest sense of the word. After all of the writings on the subject of picture manipulations, one would think that the controversial topic and the ethical issues involved in a decision to change the content of an image through a computer would be at the top of anyone's list. But here it is revealed in Chapman's work that the issue only rates a passing reference in issue number seven. Most likely if a similar panel of word-oriented experts were convened to decide the important issues for photographic education for the next decade, picture manipulation ethics would get a higher ranking.

Computers and digitization are sexy, exciting topics where writers can find audiences for their opinions and technical advice. The journalism community, if

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[1] Chapman, N. (1992). Issues of Photography by the Year 2000. Unpublished dissertation. La Verne University, Claremont, California.

not the general public, is concerned that the credibility of images and consequently, of words, will suffer if the content, as the photographer took the picture at the time, is altered by a computer operator far removed from the actual scene. That issue is a valid and important concern worthy of extended discussion. But concentration on the picture manipulation issue detracts from other, perhaps more important issues that face photography and photographic educators as detailed in Chapman's work and in this paper. Because of the universality of the topics raised, there are implications for journalism instructors as well.

Computer Digitization and the Ethics

Much has been written in recent years since it was revealed that *National Geographic* moved a pyramid. It can certainly be argued that the *Geographic* editors and artists did the journalistic community a great service by committing that ethical slip. Jeff Adams, Kurt Foss, Paul Lester, John Long, Sheila Reeves, and Fred Ritchin among others have written about the tools, the issues, and the dangers to journalism credibility if picture manipulations become common for editorial images.

Adams, head of the Electronic Photojournalism Lab at the University of Missouri and Foss, regularly feature technical breakthroughs in their column within the pages of *News Photographer* magazine, the trade publication for newspaper and broadcast photojournalists.[2]

Lester in his textbook, *Photojournalism: An Ethical Approach*, points out that subject and picture manipulations have occurred since photography's introduction. In 1839 Hippolyte Bayard made the first stage managed picture. Shortly afterward, photographers such as Nadar were using elaborate touch-up

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[2] For example, see Adams, A. and Foss, K. (July 1991). Image compression: Key to the electronic newspaper. *News Photographer*, pp. 48-49.

techniques to improve the quality of their prints while Henry Robinson and Oscar Rejlander were using cutting and pasting techniques to combine images from several pictures into one composite photograph.[3]

When Long was president of the National Press Photographers Association, he was responsible for coming up with the idea to publish the *NPPA's Special Report: The Ethics of Photojournalism* that contained a chapter on the manipulation of images. He also regularly wrote for *News Photographer* magazine. On the threat of credibility by picture manipulations, he wrote, "If you destroy the credibility of your work, even in small ways, it destroys the credibility of your newspaper or TV station in the eyes of the people you are covering."[4]

Through elaborate surveys of magazine and newspaper editors, Reeves has attempted to discover the limits of ethical content with regards to picture manipulations. She has found that editors will tolerate traditional manipulations using the computer -- those that can be accomplished in the darkroom with an enlarger -- but not alterations that change dramatically the content of the image.[5]

In his landmark book, *In Our Own Image* on the complicated issues surrounding digital imaging, Ritchin makes the point that "Photography's relationship with reality is as tenuous as that of any other medium." Photographs have always had a problem with objectivity and truthfulness. Ritchin advocates a continued dialogue on the subject of digital manipulation in order to prevent acceptance of wholesale fabrications.[6]

The computer is simply another in a long line of necessary tools that aid

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[3] Lester, P. (1991). *Photojournalism: An Ethical Approach.* Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., pp. 90-132.

[4] Ibid., p. 132.

[5] For example, see Reeves, S. (1990). *The Ethics of Photojournalism.* Durham, North Carolina: NPPA, pp. 42-49.

[6] Ritchin, F. (1990). *In Our Own Image.* New York: Aperture Foundation, Inc., p. 1.

photographers in their quest to produce the best possible picture. Why then is there such an outpouring of concern about photography's credibility when photographic images have always been manipulated and questioned? Maybe it is a sign of the times when business and congressional leaders no longer adhere to a strict system of ethical behavior. When the savings and loan industry can be tarnished by a few corrupt business people and the Congress is mired in controversy concerning perks for its members, the occasional altering of an image by manipulation software seems minor in comparison. But there are larger implications that the above writers have addressed: the industry's reliance on freelance photographers for images -- freelancers who may not have the academic background to be concerned about larger, ethical issues and who freely manipulate their images in order to improve their content. Other important concerns stressed by writers in the manipulation milieu are the proliferation of easy-to-use and inexpensive software products that give sophisticated manipulation techniques into the hands of anyone with a computer and the time to learn how to use the programs, the issue of whether photographic coverage may be inadmissible in court proceedings if manipulation becomes widespread, and copyright and fair use issues when parts of images are combined into other pictures.

Any discussion of picture manipulation ethics must take into account where and why a picture was used - its **context**. The reputation of the publication, whether the picture is used for an editorial illustration and whether it is used in an advertisement all should be factored into a discussion on the ethical appropriateness of a picture's alteration. The *National Geographic* pyramid cover, ironically, is never discussed in terms of good, decisive moment photojournalism. That omission, of course, is part of the price paid for digital manipulation. The computer technique used for that cover and the *National*

Geographic's Poland cover was the same as for the *Day in the Life of America* cover. Professionals in the field of photojournalism get concerned by those manipulations because of the strict, objective, photojournalistic context of the respective publications. But that same technique was used for the famous Oprah/Ann Margret *TV Guide* cover - an example that always brings laughter from students, but not the concern. Again, context is vitally important. Eddie Adams' Pulitzer prize picture of the Saigon police captain executing a Viet Cong suspect during the Tet offensive in 1968 was altered and used as an advertising piece for a photo retoucher who substituted a hair dryer instead of a pistol through computer technology. The manipulation out of context would make some angry, but in an editorial illustration context, it could make, for example, a point about the way western, material culture is killing the traditions of Asians who move to this country.

Throughout the history of picture manipulations, cover photographs have been altered for many reasons: compositional and content requirements by art directors, hidden political agendas by publishers, misunderstandings by back-shop personnel, and advertising motives by many along the chain to publication.[7]

The advertising context argument is perhaps the most dangerous in terms of accuracy and credibility for the photojournalism profession. An advertisement is what readers recognize as an advertisement - separate from editorial work, with obvious, time-honored visual and verbal clues that advocate a particular product or service. Readers do not recognize cover photographs as advertisements in the traditional use of the word. For that reason alone, the advertising argument should never be invoked as a valid reason for altering cover pictures. A cover photograph sets the style and content for all the other pictures in the publication. It should be as untainted by the threat of manipulations as all

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[7] See Lester, pp. 90-132.

of the inside pictures. (Taken to its logical conclusion and the advertising argument can be used to justify altering every inside picture. A potential buyer always will thumb through the issue to see how the other pictures stack up with his or her expectations derived from the cover. Shouldn't every picture be as content and compositionally correct as it is technologically possible?) What if the magazine cover advertising argument makes its way to newspaper front pages? What is there to prevent a daily publication from unleashing art directors to jazz up page 1 photos? In a twist of the advertising argument, the diet Coke® can was removed from the St. Louis picture because of the hidden advertisement for the soft drink.

Past violations in ethical standards have come about for the most part because an **internal element** of the picture had been altered or removed. A pyramid or a tree was digitally panned. Color was added to a California sky. A diet Coke® can was removed. Ann Margret's head was placed on Oprah's body. Whenever an internal element is added or removed from a picture regardless of the reason, the ethical line is crossed. How is an internal element defined? It is any part of a picture that cannot be cropped out along the edges of the frame. As long as the original meaning of the picture is not changed, most journalism professionals can accept all of the traditional darkroom manipulations along with the computer controls of color balancing and even sharpening that are at the disposal of a photographer or editor. But most cannot accept an editor, photographer, art director, publisher, or back-shop person monkeying around with the internal elements of a photograph. Manufacturers could help out by creating software without a cut and paste option, although that remedy is a bit extreme given the illustration requirements of a publication. It is far better to have NPPA and educators advocate such a policy.

It is not the time to hide from the current choices of photo manipulation

software hoping the problem of picture credibility will eventually resolve itself. Educators need to be familiar with the software in order to spark discussions with students as to ethical uses and abuses.

If not now, in the next five years, more photojournalism students will be using electronic digital cameras. Consequently, the demand for darkroom space will dramatically decrease while the demand for computer workstations will conversely increase. Educators must teach themselves how the software can be used to make all of the traditional darkroom manipulations and how that same software can be used to manipulate the content of those images.

Included in this discussion are five examples that were manipulated using Photoshop® in about two hours. Although crudely printed on a 300 dpi laser printer (and further deteriorated by the photocopying process), they show the range of opportunities that educators can demonstrate to students on equipment that is readily available in most computer labs. Figure 1 shows Joe Nameth as Wendell Willkie in pictures taken by Ken Regan and John D. Collins.[8] Figure 2 shows the radio star, Fred Allen by Herbert Gehr as Sewell Avery taken by photographer Harry Hall. The Saigon policeman and the Viet Cong suspect by Eddie Adams are now engaged in a pistol duel in Figure 3. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* finally got the headline right in Figure 4 originally photographed by W. Eugene Smith. Finally, Joe Rosenthal has been criticized for possibly stage managing the famous Iwo Jima flag raising picture. In Figure 5 the group of soldiers forgot to put their flag on the pole.

Educators can easily include a flatbed scanning and a digital manipulation assignment within their traditional photojournalism course, as long as the equipment is available. If funding is a problem (and where is funding not a

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[8] All of the pictures were scanned using a flatbed scanner. See Scherman, D. (ed.). (1973). *The Best of Life*. New York: Avon Books, pp. 12-13, 24, 45, 61, 86, and 278 and Edom, C. (1980). *Photojournalism*. Dubuque: Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers, p. 135.

problem?) educators need to be more creative in their approaches. Perhaps there are university or state grants that have not been tapped. Perhaps there is equipment in other departments that can be utilized. Perhaps the local newspaper can offer expertise and demonstrations. Perhaps educators without scanning equipment can form traditional postal service and electronic mail links between instructors with such devices so that images can be put in digital form. When Kodak offers its Photo CD service in about another year, students and educators will be able to easily convert analog film images to digital pictures. Whatever method is used, educators need to be ahead of the curve in order to better prepare their students for future career opportunities. Nevertheless, ethical concerns must be at the heart of any technical discussion but not the only topic on the table for discussion.

Other Issues of Concern: Traditional Manipulative Methods

Besides computer manipulation, there are many more traditional ways a picture can be manipulated - an area that always needs clarification. No editor for a news magazine or newspaper would hire Greg Heisler to cover a spot news fire. His style demands a high degree of manipulation. (Again, that is a fact well-known within the photojournalism community, but not by the general public. When he illustrates a chess match in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, average readers do not consider his methods.) W. Eugene Smith and Margaret Bourke-White regularly asked their subjects to repeat actions, stage managed their subjects and even double-printed negatives. Many times a lighting assistant accompanies a *National Geographic* photographer. *USA Today* glorifies the set up mug shot. Weather feature set ups turn into near tragedies. Journalists give money to crack addicts and drive them to their junkies. Campaign and celebrity handlers guide and control the visual images that a photographer makes so that the public gets as sanitized and wholesome of view as it is possible. No one

would have been upset if the diet Coke® can had been moved by the photographer before the portrait was made (although this author would have slapped his student on the wrist for that ethical violation) or had the can been sitting further at the edge of the frame and simply cropped out by the photographer. Are the above examples of manipulation worthy of the brand -- unethical? *News Photographer* magazine remains a prime place for photographers to voice their ethical outrage over violations. But how many reporting instructors and students subscribe to that magazine?

Picture manipulation is an important topic, but since it has been a constant theme in photography since at least 1839, it is not a terribly interesting ethical question. As a technological, instructional methods and legal question, digital photography is one of the most fascinating issues in the history of communication. Victims of violence and right to privacy issues are much more interesting ethical problems for students than whether it is proper to erase a line through a picture or move a pyramid.

Ethics codes and photojournalism professors stress ideals. Those ideals are not subject to modification by the purchase of expensive photo retouching computers, political agendas, compositional or content constraints, deadline pressures, or economic realities in the competitive magazine marketplace. Ideals are meant to apply for everyone in every situation. Accuracy and credibility are time-worn, journalistic ideals that should be clearly stressed to beginning photojournalism students.

Other Issues of Concern: 'Shock Ads'

Photojournalism educators have always been secure with the argument that subject and picture manipulations within an advertising context is fair game. But when cover or front page editorial images become accepted as being within an advertising context, that secure argument is put on its head. Advertising today is

experimenting with a new format dubbed "Shock Ads" by media critics. The Benetton clothing manufacturer was the first to shock magazine readers with its series of editorial images, one where AIDS sufferer David Kirby lies dying with his family around him.[9] When the image first appeared in *Life* magazine, within an editorial context, the picture evoked little if any public reaction. But used as an advertisement within the pages of *Vanity Fair*, *Vogue*, and *Interview*, the picture provoked extreme interest.[10] How can educators tell students that all is fair with advertising images when the context and definitions are changing so rapidly? My photojournalism students assumed that since the picture was used in an advertisement, that the family members in the picture were actually models hired to look depressed over the death of a loved one. When they were told that the face of the victim was possibly altered to look more like a religious leader, their reaction was no reaction at all. It is an advertisement, they said -- anything is fair in an advertisement, right?

The Benetton advertisement campaign demands further research and discussion. For example, does the general public look at news, feature and advertising pictures in different contexts as do journalism professionals? If there is no readily acknowledged distinction between the three different types of pictures among ordinary persons, might that be an alarm siren for professionals and educators who write their concerns about the loss of picture credibility? Credibility might have been lost a long time ago.

Other Issues of Concern: A Synthesis of Words and Pictures

For hundreds and hundreds of years technology has kept words, pictures and their producers separate and unequal. Before Gutenberg, less than 10 percent of people could read and those were mainly Catholic Church members.

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[9] Horovitz, B. (March 22, 1992). 'Shock Ads': New Rage is Spawning Attention, Outrage. *The Los Angeles Times*, pp. D1, D11.

[10] See (March 1992). *Vanity Fair*, pp. 132-133.

Seventy years after his invention, 80 percent of the entire population of Europe could read.[11] Seventy years after Daguerre's invention, almost everyone had a Kodak camera and could see pictures published in their local newspapers. And yet a visual grammar was not developed by educators for photographs in the same way as a verbal grammar after Gutenberg was developed for words. Furthermore, writers and photographers were kept apart by separate production facilities, job descriptions, educational backgrounds, and working class biases. Technology gave writers the excuse to exclude visual reporters from their world of influence. In an effort to keep visually-oriented producers down, photographers were considered "reporters with their brains knocked out," simple-minded and juvenile Jimmy Olsons or rude, gate-crashing 'Animals.'

But now, ironically, technology is causing a merger between words and images. Because pictures are being produced in enormous quantities, people are starting to learn the grammar of the visual image. Pictures are making sense to viewers without the need for words. Writers are starting to panic -- "MTV Quick-Cut Videos Shorten Attention Spans" -- screams the banner headline. Video at eleven. We all saw Rodney King lying on his knees being struck again and again. We all knew what we saw and what it meant. But after the word processors (i.e. lawyers) were finished, we were not as sure anymore.

We are told by those who do not know how to use a camera or analyze a photograph that a camera lies and that a picture is not really a true representation of reality. These are arguments by writers who are afraid of the merger between words and pictures. A camera is simply an uncritical box -- it does not lie and it does not tell the truth. A picture is as real as the viewer can make it.

Other Issues of Concern: Need for a Theory of Visual

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[11] Sculley, J. (1992). Computers, Communications and Content. *Ethics, Copyright, and the Bottom Line*. Camden, Maine: Center for Creative Imaging, p. 15.

Communication

Computers excite or panic writers and photographers. Computers will eventually merge words and pictures to such an extent that words will become pictures and pictures words. Already, graphic design turns words into pictorial elements while pictures become symbols that stand for complicated messages. What is desperately needed in the field of visual communication is a theory that can explain and set within a context this rapid merging of words and images.

Perceptual psychologists have introduced communication researchers to the theories of structuralism and the Gestalt, constructive, ecological and cognitive approaches. According to the various theories, image processing can be a result of concentrating on the tiny elements that make up a picture (structuralism), organizing those basic elements into a coherent whole (Gestalt), taking into account the role and past experiences of the observer (constructive), taking into account the environment of the stimulus (ecological), or knowing the meaning of the objects under observation (cognitive). Semiotics, the study of signs, comes closest in assigning images meaning through a cognitive process that involves mental thoughts in the form of words. Likewise, visual theorists as diverse as Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag and Sol Worth argue eloquently that much of the power of the visual medium comes from an observer's conscious confrontation with the subject matter as it relates to that person's experiences. A viewer finds closure for a particular set of image content elements by bringing a personal context to the process. None of those theories, however, specifically unravel the mystery of how words and images might be combined within a technological framework that is quickly synthesizing the two as used in communication mediums.

In her book *Semiotics of Visual Language*, Fernande Saint-Martin describes a "syntactic analysis of visual texts as representations of nonvisual

experiences and constructs." For Saint-Martin, the visual elements within an image's frame find meaning through word cognition. She continues,

> This syntactic theory allows us to understand how visual language represents ... those dynamic processes linked to our sensory, emotive, and conceptual experience ... in order to render them accessible to a level of linguistic representation which makes consciousness itself possible.[12]

The work in visual communication theory should begin with Saint-Martin's notion that in order for a visual image to be a part of a person's consciousness, it must be translated into words. The next step in theory building is to set this concept into a communication framework that applies to all mediums that use images. Given the powerful communicative abilities of words and pictures, the sooner a theory is produced, the better. Such a new way of looking at the communicative capabilities of the combination of works and pictures will spark new areas of research and will develop links that exploit, in the best sense of the word, the new technologies.

As technology forces a change in the attitudes about the relationship between words and pictures and the relationship between their individual producers, pictures will no longer be regulated to mere window dressing advertising the good stuff inside the store. Images will be the store. Images in both words and pictures, combined within a new form of communication, will become mirrors that reflect the experiences and expectations back to the viewer. Without a solid visual communication theory, quite possibly, the viewer will be able to interpret and use word/picture communications long before researchers can explain the phenomenon. Educators with word and image backgrounds need to work together to anticipate the social, economic and educational changes that

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[12] Saint-Martin, F. (1987). *Semiotics of Visual Language*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p. xiv.

will arise (that are arising) as technology proceeds. Researchers and writers in the field of photojournalism and graphic design must never become so distracted by the flavor of the month that one fails to see that there are many other items of interest on nearby shelves.

Figure 1

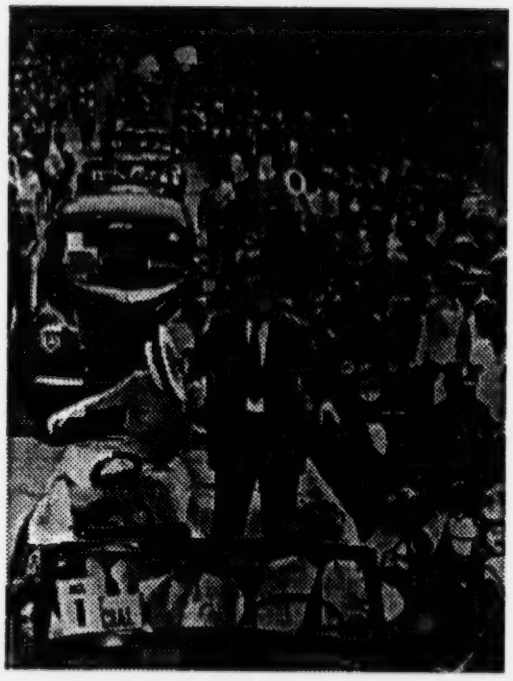

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Figure 2

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Figure 3

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Figure 4

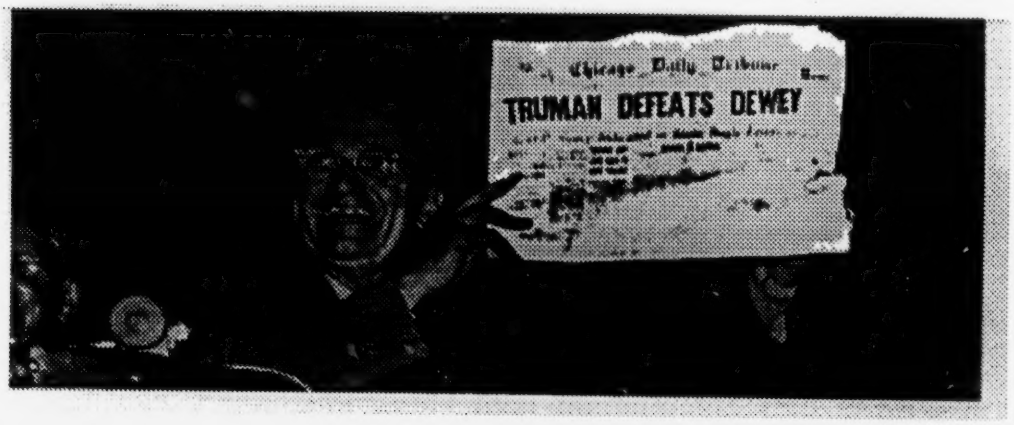

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Figure 5

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